



EVIDENCE-BASED LIBRARY MANAGEMENT AS A NEW CONCEPT FOR DECISION MAKERS: A CASE STUDY IN TURKEY

Asiye Kakırman Yıldızⁱ

Assoc. Prof., Information and Records Management Department,
University of Marmara, İstanbul, Turkey

Abstract:

Introduction: This paper will present a study that explores the way in which librarians in Turkey use their knowledge and evidence upon which to base their decision making.

Method: One method is to carry out a questionnaire of literature on the subject. The other method is to use analytical data by interviewing library managers.

Analysis: The problem of the lack of recognition of the Evidence-Based Library Management (EBLM) concept in Turkey can result particularly in Library managers making uninformed decisions based on on-trend practices.

Results: This study has found that managers and executives of Turkish libraries have inadequate knowledge of the EBLM concept. Library managers need to consider and plan for practical steps that could be taken to introduce the concept of evidence based practice in their decision-making process.

Conclusion: Library managers will have to be able to learn to change from a culture of institution-based decision making to an evidence-based decision making process based on analytics and concrete results.

Keywords: Evidence-Based Library Management, decision making, librarian practice

Introduction

The professional practice of librarians often relies on interpreting evidence in order to arrive at informed decisions. However, evidence based library management (hereafter EBLM) is a relatively new concept for librarians. This paper explores the way in which

ⁱ Correspondence: email akakirman@marmara.edu.tr

librarians in Turkey use their knowledge and evidence to base their decision making. Although the new concept of EBLM is being debated worldwide, in Turkey the concept has not yet gained recognition.

For the purposes of this study, the author questionnaired 34 directors/library managers, mostly from university and research libraries and learned from their experiences and insights about EBLM. In addition to this, the present author also collected some information about on the use of evidence in decision making in libraries by library managers.

While Turkish library managers recognise the value of collecting and using evidence (data) for planning and decision making, they do that from the outside looking in, instead of using their own institutional resources.

In the literature, EBLM is a relatively new concept. But, from 1990's almost the whole World countries have been discussing about EBLM except Turkey. This study will accomplish to create awareness and contribute the literature about this topic in Turkey.

1. What is evidence?

For an institution, evidence consists of statistics and results that are obtained from important service-provision sources in a systematical way and using verifiable and standardized methods. The institution then examines, synthesizes and interpreters this information in the context of the existing situation.

For evidence based library management, the search of the literature in order to obtain evidence in a proper manner is especially important. Therefore, the more detailed the search carried out at this stage, the more successful the process of correctly formulating the question will be.

One problem is that those who adopt a particular approach will have many different and even conflicting reasons for not doing so, and will in some cases fundamentally disagree with each other on essential points. There are numerous views on what evidence is, and what purpose it serves. How is it obtained, used and classified into types? How is its relevance judged? (Hunsucker, 2007).

Apart from questions of what evidence consists of, how it is obtained and used, classifying evidence into types and wider categories are still problematic issues. For this reason, in the evidence based library system, the accurate definition of the word "evidence" appears to be a priority factor for successful management.

2. Evidence based management concept

It would be incorrect to think that if management decisions are based on the most solid evidence, then managers would systematically learn from experience and company applications would reflect principles based on solid ideas and analyses. The reason for this is that decisions about business tend to be based on hope and fear, trying to do as others do, what the upper-level managers did in the past and believed to be effective and their favoured ideologies- in short, based on a lot of unrealistic factors. Although evidence based practices started in the medical field and later, with some difficulties, entered the field of business management, they have not significantly changed the management style of most businesses (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2009).

Managers trying to cure the ailments of their own institutions tend to behave in the same way as doctors. Managers who are looking for the best solution to a problem also encounter more difficult problems than doctors do because institutions, in contrast to people, differ from each other in terms of size, age and structure. Moreover, in business life it is far riskier to assume that a “cure” which was developed and tested somewhere else could be applied across the board (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000).

Many managers damage their institutions by importing performance measures and practices that are based on their own past experiences. For example, a manager who knows that another institution with a different internal pay structure, that works well for them, may make a serious error by expecting that this structure will have the same effect in a different institution. Even if they produce the same goods, the target customer groups, markets, and modes of distribution of the two companies are completely different. (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000).

3. Evidence based library management

Evidence based library management is one of the most significant contemporary developments in professional library practice. Decision maker librarians need to consider and plan for practical steps that could be taken to introduce the concept of evidence based library management. This process will provide librarians with the information for implementing the crucial first step (Brice, Booth and Bexon, 2005). It is generally accepted that the concept of evidence based practice was first developed at McMaster University in Canada in the early 1990s, broadening out in the mid-1990s to “evidence-based healthcare” (Brophy, 2009).

EBLM is a new concept in management literature. Essentially it is a simple idea. It entails finding the best evidence that you can, facing those facts and acting on those

facts – rather than doing what everyone else does, what you have always done, or what you thought was true (Lakos, 2007).

The EBLM idea and its appeal can best be seen in the context of a growing crisis of legitimization in the environments of its practitioners. The EBLM concept, discourse and program, as initially introduced to the library profession, was directly and deliberately transferred with a minimum of necessary adaptation, from the healthcare sector. The compelling idea seems to have been: if such an enlightened innovation can catch on in medicine, why not in library management? (Hunsucker, 2007). It is also important to recognise that EBLM is not just about the evidence itself, but also encompasses the process by which the evidence is gathered and applied (Brophy, 2009). Proponents of EBLM have contributed to all stages of the process, taking the techniques of the wider paradigm and replicating or modifying them before applying them to their own practice. EBLM emphasises a five-step requisite process (Booth, 2003).

Step 1- Define the problem / question: The first stage of EBLM is to focus or formulate your question, which involves converting a precise, yet possibly vaguely expressed, information need from practice into an answerable, focused, structured question (Brice, 2005).

Eldredge (2000) comments that questions drive the entire EBLM process. EBLM assigns highest priority to posed questions with greatest relevance to library practice. The wording and content of the questions will determine what kinds of research designs are needed to secure access.

Step 2- Searching the Literature: The second stage in the EBLM process requires a comprehensive and thorough search of the literature, to identify evidence relevant to the topic in question. Finding evidence to answer questions in the domain of library science is a complicated task, due to the fact that the evidence base is contained in multiple and varied information sources. This means that information might appear in the literature base of many other disciplines, as well as in the main library and information science databases. This may require searching the management and marketing literature or the education or computing literature. Also, in terms of research quality, LIS research typically utilises designs of limited applicability, such as the user questionnaire. The most appropriate study design will vary according to the topic under investigation (Brice, Booth and Bexon, 2005).

For the purpose of this study a search of Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) was conducted using free text words such as social sciences. Our search was limited to major databases due to access issues and other databases that may

also have been useful for our question are the educational sources such as ERIC, ASSIA, INSPEC and Social Science Citation Index (Brice, Booth and Bexon, 2005).

Step 3- Filtering Search Results: Growing interest in EBLM, encouraging practitioners to base decisions on sound research evidence, has stimulated the development of so-called “methodological filters”. Such methodological search filters initially arose out of researchers’ concerns in locating “Randomized Controlled Trials” to avoid publication bias, associated with flawed results and invalid conclusions (Booth, 2003).

Step 4- Appraising the Literature: Appraising the literature means critical appraisal actually. Critical appraisal uses intrinsic (design) rather than extrinsic (author, journal, institution) factors to help the practitioner decide whether an article is worth reading. The more rigorous intrinsic factors that relate to research design and aspects of methodology are the focus of critical appraisal (Brice, Booth and Bexon, 2005).

In other words we put aside our prejudices regarding the source or nature of a research study and judge it entirely on its own merits. To do this we need to take into account the three important factors of validity, reliability and applicability (Brice, Booth and Bexon, 2005).

Step 5- Applying the results in practice: It is important that the final stages of the EBLM process, applying the results and evaluating your performance are followed through. A range of behavioural and educational interventions exist to facilitate a culture of change, which although observed in the health environment, are transferable to other settings, such as audit, accreditation, benchmarking and on-going evaluation alongside innovation (Brice, Booth and Bexon, 2005).



Figure 1: Excellent Components of Evidence Based Library Management
(Kakırman Yıldız, 2013)

4. Case study with library directors

A questionnaire was implemented to ascertain the views of Library managers on evidence-based library management in Turkey and evidence in deciding how decisions were made. Subsequently, contact was established with university and research library administrators. The process of random sampling method was adopted and approximately 50 university and research libraries were identified, of which 34 agreed to participate.

A questionnaire was implemented to ascertain the views of Library managers on evidence-based library management in Turkey and evidence in deciding how decisions were made. Subsequently contact was established with university and research library administrators. The process adopted all research and university libraries which are approximately 200 in Turkey and between them 50 universities were agreed to participate, of which 34 were evaluated to be completed answers.

The aim of the collect data is to draw a frame about EBLM in Turkey. Because of this, to call data collection instrument is a questionnaire instead of questionnaire. Therefore, it was no need for validity and reliability analysis.

It was decided that those at the director level would be the focus of the questionnaire because they are primary decision-makers within their library organizations and are primarily accountable for the success or failure of their institutions and also because of the influence they exert on their staff and on the profession including local institutional culture.

5. The questionnaire and discussions

The questionnaire that was implemented consisted of the following questions:

1 - Have you heard the phrase before EBLM? If yes, please explain?

2 – Where do you get the information or data needed to make your decisions? Could you please explain?

3 - In the library, is there a person or unit who is tasked with collecting data or analyzing data? If yes, please give brief details?

4 - Decision-making data collection source most commonly used, (1-6, 1 being most frequently used source of data and 6 for least frequently used source of data source).

- () Popular management styles () Case Studies () Results of the implementation of others
() Corporate Information () Personal experience () Internet research

5 - Which issues do you feel require the collection of data? Could you please explain?

As can be seen in the chart below, as a result of the work of library managers in Turkey, only 4 out of 34 people was knowledgeable about EBLM. This result reveals very low levels of awareness amongst library managers about EBLM.

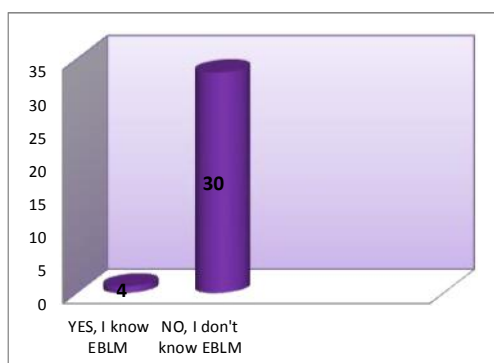


Figure 2: Results of Library Manager about EBLM

Summary of questionnaire results

The first question related to the awareness of Turkish library managers of evidence-based library management. The following are some general synopsized results:

- ✓ This study has shown that the vast majority of library managers were unaware of EBLM. Only 4 out of 34 of questionnaire participants in the questionnaire were aware of the existence of EBLM. This statistic clearly shows that there is not enough awareness of EBLM in Turkish libraries. This study also found that the term "evidence-based", in relation to the performance and quality issues, was not familiar to questionnaire participants.
- ✓ Those managers, who were aware of EBLM, were unaware of how to take advantage of it or how to adopt this this management style within their business processes.

The second question focused on sources of available data, the type of data available, the ease or difficulty with which data is collected, the varying levels of available analysis and the structure or process for data collection, organization and analysis. The following are some of the summarized results:

- ✓ Almost all the managers are trying to obtain the information they need from outside sources. For this, the most commonly used method is to search the internet and to use the search engine Google.
- ✓ Library managers work to test the accuracy of information obtained from the Internet and prefer not to utilize information obtained from the internet that they do not deem to be reliable.
- ✓ Many library directors obtain the information they need from the internet, books and electronic databases.
- ✓ 8 library managers stated that they benefited from the experiences of others in their own decision-making process, whereas 2 of those stated that they drew on their own experiences when making decisions.
- ✓ 1 out of 4 managers who expressed EBLM deciding that benefited from corporate reports and statistics.
- ✓ Some library directors stated that they attempted to obtain data through comparing their own institution to other libraries with a similar structure.

The third question item focused on the creation or the availability of some kind of organizational framework or staff position with responsibility for data collection.

- ✓ Half of the questionnaires library administrators stated there is no responsible for collecting data and analysis within their organization. Thus of the 34 libraries considered in the questionnaires at least 17 of them did not consider the task of collecting and analyzing data important enough to warrant the creation of a post for data collection.
- ✓ The questionnaire found that only 2 of the institutions had staff whose task it was to undertake data analysis and collection. The remaining questionnaires stated that data analysis and collection fell within the job description of every librarian and that it was not necessary to designate a unit or member of staff to carry out the above functions.
- ✓ The questionnaire found that some managers/directors did not create data collection/analysis posts either due to budgetary constraints or because of the lack of librarians with expertise in the field.
- ✓ Only 1 of 34 of that questionnaire recognized the importance of corporate knowledge. The remaining questionnaires relied on data from external sources when required to make decisions. Such external sources of information included the internet, databases, printed publications, statistics and case studies.

The fourth question attempted to identify the most commonly used source of data collection in the 34 institutions that participated in the questionnaire.

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	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Popular Management Styles		– 1	1	4	3	6
Case Studies	4	4	5	1	1	–
Implementation Results of Others		– 2	3	5	4	1
Corporate Information	5	3	1	1	4	1
Personal Experience	1	2	3	2	1	4
Internet Research	5	3	2	1	1	3

Table 1: Source of Data Collection

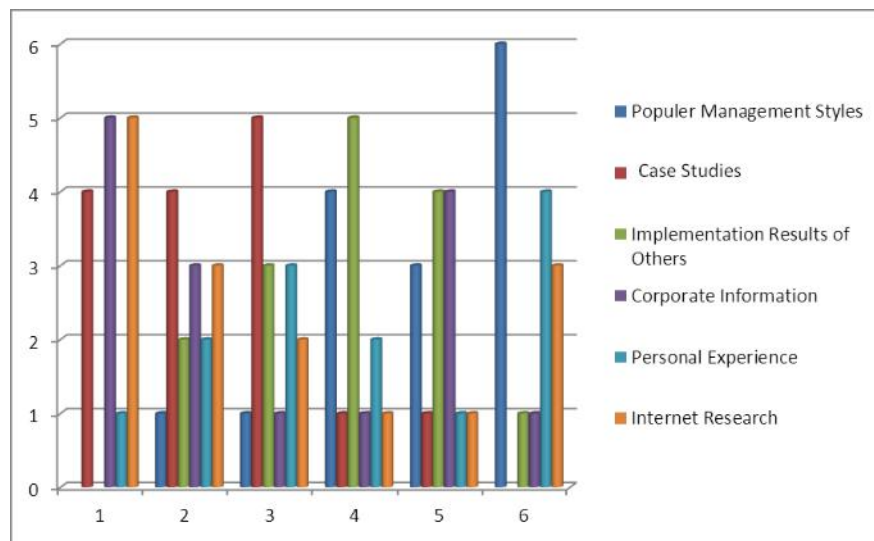


Figure 3: Source of Data Collection

- ✓ The questionnaire found that the most common form of data collection when corporate managers/directors were at decision-making stage was to use internal (corporate) knowledge or to rely on the internet. This was followed by the use of case studies and to a lesser extent personal experience for information collection.
- ✓ It is interesting to note that the use of the internet during the decision-making process for data collection was viewed as being as important as corporate knowledge.
- ✓ It was found that not much weight was attached to the personal experiences of corporate managers during the decision-making process and that the results of case studies were deemed to be more important than relying on knowledge gained through personal experience.
- ✓ It is almost always the case that when making decisions that managers did not utilize popular management styles as a tool.
- ✓ Another interesting conclusion that can be gleaned from the questionnaire is that although corporate managers valued internet research as highly as corporate

knowledge, the number of those questionnaires who did not find data found on the internet to be credible was high.

The fifth and final question aimed to determine the aim with which managers collected data for decision making processes.

- ✓ Almost half of those questionnaires said that they collected information primarily for corporate business processes (ideal business hours, budgetary matters and employee satisfaction, etc.).
- ✓ Most managers stated that they collected data in order to learn about new applications and contemporary management styles in the field of librarianship (for example, total quality management, human resource management)
- ✓ Some managers also stated that they collected data in order to determine corporate strategy and objectives and to analyze the current state of the field. By doing so they compared their own organization to others in the field they deemed to be worthy of comparison.

Conclusion

This study has found that managers and executives of Turkish libraries have inadequate knowledge of the EBLM concept. Not only does Turkish literature on the subject not exist, but research on EBLM is not currently being undertaken, with the exception of this study, which is the first of its kind in Turkey.

The problem of the lack of recognition of the EBLM concept in Turkey can result in library managers making uninformed decisions based on on-trend practices which are continued instead of capitalizing on the intellectual heritage of the organisation or their own experiences.

Library managers will have to be able to learn to change from a culture of institution-based decision making to an evidence-based decision based on analytics and concrete results. Above all, they need to cultivate a culture of reflective practice, continually questioning what they do, regardless of whether the stimulus is published research, user feedback or their own professional observations.

Library managers need to consider and plan for practical steps that could be taken to introduce the concept of evidence based practice in their decision-making processes. EBLM is one of the most significant developments in professional library practice.

Evidence based management may seem frustrating for institutions or libraries and their managers who face uncertainty and complexity. However, even if the institutions have so little or don't have any data, in other words evidence, to answer the

needs of the user communities or to help the institution on their deciding, there is always a way to do it.

Primarily, doing a field study will provide important data. For this, satisfaction surveys can be given to the library users who use the library physically or remotely. We can give this short but important survey through mail for online users or by hand for the physically visiting users. Satisfaction survey will uncover the needs and expectations of the users and will allow library to create a picture in the minds of the users.

A similar survey to the satisfaction survey should be applied to librarians who are the internal customers that actually are the face of the library since they address the customers directly. Thus, if the employee is happy, the customer will be happy as well. In other words, the behaviours of the librarians who are happy and enthusiastic in their job will be focused on the customer satisfaction. Apart from that, the satisfaction survey that will be given to the librarians will put forth the status of the library from the employee point of view.

The gaps that emerge after the satisfaction surveys are actually evidences. This means, data gathered from the users and the librarians will help collecting data on how the library is perceived; and will be used as an evidence for the required improvements in this field.

About the author

Asiye KAKIRMAN YILDIZ is Associate Professor in Information and Records Management Department, University of Marmara, İstanbul, Turkey. She received his Ph.D. from Marmara University and her research interests are library management, reading habits, change management, research methods. She can be contacted at akakirman@marmara.edu.tr

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